

Ducks snatch loss from jaws of victory

By JOHN HARRIS
Of the Emerald

Someone in the press box had the gall to say, "I told you so," when Brigham Young's Doug Williams bolted 1 yard for the winning touchdown against Oregon with 3:03 left in Saturday's game at Autzen Stadium.

Hell, the outcome became as obvious as the day was sunny midway through the third quarter when the Ducks' Tim Durando fumbled at the BYU three, the Cougars recovered and then sent in second-string quarterback Jim McMahon to replace starter Marc Wilson.

For the past four weeks Oregon has been victimized by a never-ending variety of its own mistakes and the play of a reserve quarterback, who comes into the game late in the second half and leads his team to come from behind to win over the Ducks.

From week to week only the names and Oregon's method of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory changes. The Ducks now own a 0-6 record and have lost their last four games by four, three, and one points.

Luckily for Oregon, some of the 24,500 fans in Autzen soaked up enough sunshine and bourbon and coke to have forgotten by now how the Ducks managed to blow a 16-3 lead. Much of the rest of the crowd found the game outright unbelievable.

Oregon coach Rich Brooks was among the latter. Sitting on a bench in the locker room following the contest, Brooks was in such a state of shock that he laughed while saying, "This is the most incredible thing I've ever been around. It's amazing. I thought we'd get over that big hurdle, but obviously we didn't."

What irked Brooks most was a series of costly mistakes dealing with facets of play that hitherto had not overly concerned the Oregon coaches.

The Ducks' first faulty snap to the punter of the year resulted in a BYU touchdown on the following play, cutting Oregon's lead to 16-10 with 6:21 left in the game.

On the Cougars' next possession Oregon cornerback Rick Hudnell, whose play has been superlative of late, was flagged for interference in the BYU end zone, thus setting up Williams' winning touchdown.

Those were by no means the Ducks' only errors. After freshman tailback Dwight Robertson, who rushed for 72 yards on five carries, sprinted 58 yards to the BYU 6 in the third quarter, it looked as though Oregon might put the game out of reach; a touchdown would have lifted the Ducks to a 22-3 lead. But on third down from the three Durando was stripped of the ball while playing

cat and mouse with a BYU line-man on an option play.

"I fumbled and lost us the game," he said in the locker room after the game. "There's no excuse for that. I should have tucked the ball away."

Durando played admirably after replacing Mike Kennedy, who suffered a slight separation of his left shoulder in the first period. A safety when the season began, Durando moved to quarterback when back-up signal caller Dan Daly quit after the Southern Cal

game. As late as last week he was the Ducks' third-string quarterback. Freshman Kevin Lusk would have replaced Kennedy had he gone down last Saturday, but during the week Durando moved up a notch on the strength of his performance in practice.

"He hasn't practiced there (quarterback) much, but did pretty damn well under the circumstances," said John Becker, Oregon offensive coordinator.

Durando completed nine of 16 passes for 93 yards and scored

Oregon's second touchdown when he caught a 13-yard pass from reserve defensive back Jim Johnson, who had entered the game as a halfback.

With Kennedy expected to be out of action for two to four weeks, Durando is set as the Ducks' quarterback, an unenviable position considering that Oregon faces the Washington Huskies Saturday in Seattle.

Really, the entire Oregon squad is in a difficult position. Four of the remaining five games are

against winning teams, and injuries are beginning to decimate the Ducks already thin ranks.

Whether or not Oregon can rebound from the ordeal of the past four weeks remains to be seen, but if Hudnell, a devout Christian who read the Bible before games, speaks for the rest of the team, the Ducks are not ready to give up yet.

"This keeps happening over and over and over again, and we've just got to make it stop," he says. "Not a single person is giving up. We all know it's there."



Photo by Steve Schneider

A fumble on the BYU 3-yard-line spoiled an otherwise fine performance by Oregon's second-string quarterback, Tim Durando.

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